



**Ending
Violence**
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

BACKGROUND

First National Survey of Sexual Violence Organizations (SVOs) and Services

Pandemic impacts on SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The survey revealed that **83% of SVOs reported increased or consistently high demand for sexual violence support services** compared to pre-pandemic levels.

Some respondents elaborated on the **significant *degree* of demand increases**:

- ⇒ *“We saw a 65% increase in clients last year.”*
- ⇒ *“Our agency is now seeing 4x the number of clients...”*
- ⇒ *“We used to serve 200 annually, last year we served 500, due to increased demand on service and increased funding, [which enabled us] to hire more counsellors for direct service.”*

Reasons for this increase extrapolated from the survey data included:

- **Increased complexity of needs:** housing, employment, health, mental health, and addiction;
- **Increased mental health impacts of the pandemic on historical trauma** from sexual violence during lockdowns and stay-at-home measures; and
- **Exposure to technology-facilitated sexual violence.**

Pandemic impacts on WORKERS in the field of sexual violence

The national survey found that the pandemic negatively impacted the mental health and wellness of some workers in organizations tackling sexual violence. Specifically,

- **46% reported staff had to take medical leave** for pandemic-related reasons such as stress, burnout or illness;
- **54% indicated they faced increased challenges recruiting and retaining qualified staff;** and
- **Nearly 18% had staff who retired early or left the workforce** altogether.

Many also described pre-existing challenges, e.g., the long-term under-resourcing of SVOs, which the pandemic exacerbated, even though many SVOs received emergency funding that helped them keep their doors open.

One SVO highlighted the relief that proper funding can provide to chronically under-resourced service providers:

“Inadequate funding has been a long-standing issue for our organization which impacts our operations in a range of important ways. The federal COVID funding offered an unprecedented opportunity for us to staff more comprehensively, provide a more equitable wage/benefits, engage in more public education activities, and acquire much-needed items for programming. It was wonderful to have a period of time where we are not dwelling in scarcity and lack.”

Pandemic impacts on WAIT TIMES for sexual violence services

- **76% of SVOs reported increased or consistently high wait times for services over the pandemic**, particularly for individual counselling. Only 2% reported *decreasing* wait times.
- **Individual and group counselling often had the longest wait times**, most fell between 1-6 months, but a significant portion reported counselling wait times of 6 months to 1 year or longer.

Many SVOs were already experiencing an increased demand for services pre-pandemic, due to a heightened awareness and understanding of sexual violence arising from the #MeToo movement. Some survey participants shared their strategies to help reduce wait times, such as providing psychoeducational workshops, doing consistent follow-up, and triaging for more urgent needs or more vulnerable populations.

One respondent explained the impact of longer wait times on survivors & health outcomes:

“Folks struggle with coping with the impacts of trauma on their own while they wait. It can lead to feeling isolated from the community and may exacerbate trauma reactions. Sometimes this leads to folks failing out of classes or academic programs, which further compounds the stress of the traumatic experience. So, by the time a survivor can see a clinician, they may have a lot of additional needs to attend to before psychological treatment can even begin.”

Pandemic impacts on FUNDING MODELS: core vs. emergency or project-based

Sustainable funding was a common theme, as 83% of SVOs in the survey sample received *emergency funding* to keep their doors open and pivot to providing virtual services during the pandemic. It also allowed many SVOs to hire staff and adapt service models to reflect pandemic restrictions.

However, **project-based resourcing and emergency funding only scratch the surface of what is needed**, given chronic under-resourcing of the sector.

Respondents stressed that both before and after the pandemic, **one of the largest challenges for SVOs continues to be persistent financial and structural precarity.**

As one organization put it: *“Communities in the North are underserved and severely in need of supports.*

We don’t have the funding to increase programming to where it needs to be. Our agency is strained in meeting the critical demand at this time.”

Survey DESIGN OVERVIEW

- The confidential bilingual survey comprised **80 voluntary questions completed by organizations**, not individuals, with controlled access to the digital survey link.
- The **recruitment criteria were broad** but with the capacity to disaggregate.
- The survey was downloadable along with a guide and technical support.
- The survey was **administered to 114 SVOs across Canada between June and November 2022**, with a final sample size of 102 organizations.
- There was a **strong completion rate of >85%**, representing a significant time investment by organizations.
- The data reflected sufficient **representation from independent community-based sexual violence organizations and a range of other providers of services to survivors of sexual violence.**